

# Game Changers

Cathy McMorris Rodgers on  
Women and the GOP

By Tami Nantz

**2008** was a life-changing year for many conservative women. While the vast majority of us certainly cared about what was taking place down at City Hall or up on Capitol Hill, we were busy living our lives, raising our families and trusting others to take care of the political side of things. We did our civic duty and voted, but that was the extent of our involvement in politics.

Then, August 29, 2008 happened. Senator John McCain announced that Alaska Governor Sarah Palin would be joining him on the campaign trail as his Vice Presidential running mate. What followed was nothing short of amazing...and *outrageous*. While conservative women all over the country were energized that one of our own had joined what was otherwise a rather unappealing ticket, the mainstream media launched a relentless attack aimed at the swift and absolute destruction of Governor Palin. Her family, her friends, and anyone supporting her were fair game. *This* was the event that awakened what I like to call the sleeping giant--the Republican conservative woman. One of our own was under attack, and we simply refused to sit idly by and watch it happen without doing something about it.

What many of us didn't realize was that Washington was already home to some remarkable conservative Republican women who are working hard on our behalf. I had the privilege of sitting down with one of them last week on Capitol Hill, and quickly learned that conservative women truly do have an advocate in Washington.

Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers was elected to Congress in 2004, and is currently serving her fourth term representing Eastern Washington's Fifth Congressional District. She is married to a retired, 26-year United States Navy veteran, Commander Brian Rodgers, and is mother to two precious children, Cole and Grace. The highest ranking Republican woman in Congress, McMorris Rodgers serves as Vice Chair of the House Republican Conference, is an appointed member of the powerful House Energy and Commerce Committee, Vice Chair of the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Caucus, and Vice Chair of the Hi Tech Working Group. She co-chairs seven Congressional caucuses: Down Syndrome, Disability, Military Family, Lumber, Neuroscience, the Rural Health Coalition, and Republican New Media.



In recent months, Congresswoman McMorris Rodgers - who also serves as vice chair of the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues - along with many of her colleagues in the House of Representatives, has been hard at work reaching out to American women on behalf of the Republican Party. The 2010 mid-term elections were historic in many ways for Republicans, perhaps most significantly due to the fact that they won the women's vote. I asked to talk with the Congresswoman on this issue, and she graciously accepted.

**Q: The GOP has long been known as the party of the "old white guys", and that seems to be rapidly changing with the election of women like yourself, Martha Roby, Jamie Herrera Beutler and others. I know you are working hard on that front, do you feel like the party's ready for it?**

A: More every day! It's been exciting to see that we had a record number of women elected to Congress in 2010. We had two African Americans and five Hispanics. I think it is important that the Republican Party be reflective of - be representative of - America. It just makes sense that you relate to someone who has a similar background as you do. This election was historic in many ways, including the fact that we won the women's vote. I think the Democrats are running scared right now, because they have for many years told women in America that if you're a woman, you're a Democrat. Going into the 2008 election, President Obama's approval rating among women was 69%. Right now it stands at 48%. I believe we now see women who traditionally have not taken the time to get involved in politics recognizing that it is imperative for their children, for their children's futures, for their grandchildren, that they get involved. One member recently told me "women in America see that their nest is in jeopardy", and because of that, they are making it more of a priority to take the time to get involved.

**Q: In light of how women like Michele Bachmann and Sarah Palin are being treated by the mainstream media, how do you motivate women to do that?**

A: It made me angry...the week after John McCain announced that Sarah Palin was going to be his running mate...how vicious the media came after her. I've talked to a lot of other women in America who had the same reaction. I wonder if it's really having the opposite impact than the media had hoped? They hoped it might discourage women. Instead, in many ways, I think it has motivated women. And, the mainstream media--as frustrating as they can be--don't have the control over information that they did in years past. The internet has opened up avenues for citizens to directly communicate with their representatives, and to get information that hasn't been filtered by the mainstream media in a much more timely fashion. I believe it's making a big difference. We saw this with the healthcare bill a year ago. On Christmas Eve, when the Senate voted, people knew what was in that bill immediately--they knew the deals that had been struck by Senators Nelson (NE) and Landrieu (LA). In years past, it would have taken time for that kind of information to filter out. Also, during the healthcare bill, women rose up. Women make 85% of the healthcare decisions in their household. More often than not, it's the mom who's scheduling the appointments, taking the kids to the doctor, and nudging her husband to get his check-up. Women in America do not like the idea of the federal government getting in the way of them being able to make healthcare decisions for their families.

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# SmartGirlNation

July 2011

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**Q: The average American woman watching you ladies on television sees the contrast between press conferences held by Debbie Wasserman Schultz and others on the left and those held by you ladies in the GOP. There's a distinct difference. How do you explain that?**

*A: When I look at Debbie, I see someone who's angry. I think that might be one of the differences. So often, many women on the left seem to be carrying grudges or frustrations from years gone by. On the right, I see women being more positive. We have the convictions of our beliefs, and that "can-do, we've-got-to-get-involved, we've-got-to-solve-these-problems" attitude. I see that being one of the main differences in our approach.*

We then discussed the fact that it seems like women on the right turn their anger into passion, rather than playing the victim. This is a huge distinction between Republican and Democrat women, and is a direct result of the radical, left wing feminist agenda that, while claiming to have given women more freedom and power, has left them clearly feeling invalidated, angry and miserable.

**Q: You've done a lot of work to help women get elected in recent years, what are you now doing on that front?**

*A: We're going to continue to build upon what's been started. There has been a number of women over the last hundred years who have helped lay the foundation. In recent years, we've seen trailblazers like Jennifer Dunn (R-WA '93-05), Deborah Price (R-OH '93-09), Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) and others. There's been a real effort by Republicans to recruit women to run, and I feel like it has now reached a tipping point where all that work is creating a momentum. We had a record number of women – 128 - who ran for the House in 2010. Going into 2012, we're committed to recruiting the best candidate in the country in every single district, and where we can help identify dynamic women who are active in their communities, we're going to give them the support they need to help them run a successful campaign.*

And support them she does. In 2010, McMorris Rodgers and her colleagues in the House, hosted a NRCC women's day during which they held a press conference, blogger conference call, fundraising event, and luncheon

for the candidates. Events like this continue to be held to support those who are running, and it seems to be making an enormous difference.

As we wrapped up our visit, the Congresswoman highlighted the primary difference between the Republican and Democrat parties and why Republican conservative women are the game changers.

"We're welcoming of all women. We applaud those who make the decision to stay home and raise a family, and we applaud those women who decide to pursue a career while raising a family. I look at my family - My husband has had his career, he's retired from the Navy, and now he's loving being a dad and carrying that load at home. That's how we're making it work. The Republican Party gives women the flexibility to pursue whatever their dreams may be, whether in the home or in pursuing a career. I think it's exciting that currently, two of every three new businesses are started by women. Unfortunately, they're seeing that the government often gets in the way of giving them the flexibility to pursue their dreams".

*Tami Nantz is the founder of Moms 4 Sarah Palin, a political blog launched during the 2008 presidential campaign. A writer and political activist engaged in conservative issues through social media, Tami is currently researching the rise of conservative women in American politics. She hopes to publish her findings in a book. Tami is a graduate of Bob Jones University and lives in the Washington, DC area with her husband and daughter.*

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